

Editor's Note:

In his *Hakletus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, Samuel Purchas collated a number of Jesuit letters relating to events in India and Southeast Asia under the title of “Indian Observations Gathered out of the Letters of Nicolas Pimenta, Visiter of the Jesuites in India, and of many others of that Societie, Written from divers Indian Regionas; principally relating the Countries and accidents of the Coast of Coromandel, and of Pegu.” The main source cited by Purchas are the letters of Nicolas Pimenta, whose own letters related other letters of Portuguese priests who visited Pegu from 1599, shortly after the fall of Nan-dá-bayin (r. 1581-1599), the last ruler of the First Taung-ngu Dynasty. Pimenta’s letters and most of these materials appear to have been extracted by Purchas from Padre Fernão Guerreiro’s Jesuit *Anual* published in the first nine years of the seventeenth century under the title of *Relação Annual das Coisas que fizeram os Padres da Companhia de Jesus nas suas Missões...* Nos Anos de 1600 a 1609. The following text includes only those materials relevant to Southeast Asia and particularly to Burma. Minor printer’s errors have been corrected. The letters have also been re-sorted chronologically and some paragraph breaks, as well as the section headers, have been added.

For further information on this period and place, the reader is directed to the near-contemporary account (c. 1607) of Salvador Ribeyro, published in English translation in A. MacGregor (trans.), “Briefe Account of the Kingdom of Pegu,” *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 16.2 (1926): 99-138. For general context, Victor B. Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580-1760* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) is recommended.

M.W.C.

JESUIT LETTERS ON PEGU IN THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Nicolas Pimenta & Others

Voyage to Goa in December 1597

Nicholas Pimenta, the Indian Visiter in his Letter to Cladius Aquaviva the Generall of the Jesuites, relateth his visitation Voyage from Goa in December 1597. To Cochin first, the occurrents wherein hee had certified by Letter in the Vice-royes ship or Caracke, which being richly laden was accidentally and irrecoverably fired, the Ordnance thundring Death and lightning manifold mischieves to the Rescuers. Hee sent from Cochin a Mission to Bengala, Francis Fernandes, and Dominicke Sosa; another to Pegu, Melchior Fonsera, and Andrew Boves. The effect whereof appeared in their letters.

Pimenta's Relation of Fernandes Letter of January 1599

Fernandes writ from Siripur in Bengala, in Januarie 1599 the dangers of their Voyage by Malabar Pirats, a three dayes Tempest, the shelves of Ganges, before they arrived at Gullum, two hundred and ten miles up that River: where they left one of their Societie which could meanly write to teach that Schoole. Sosa indevoured to learne the Bengalan Language and translated into it a tractate of Christian Religion, in which were confuted the Gentile and Mahumetan errors: to which was added a short Catechisme by way of Dialogue, which the Children frequenting the Schoole learned by heart, and taught the Servants in their Families, with the signe of the Crosse and other things belonging to Christianitie.

They perswaded them to erect an Hospitall, buying a house and housholdstuffe to that purpose, and reformed the courses of many which lived in Piracie, and loose lusts: and in October departed thence to the Great Port sixe hundred miles from the Small Port or Porto Pequeno, not without dangers from Tigres and Theeves. In the midway in the Kingdome of Chandecan, where they stayed a moneth to reforme disorders by Lusts and Discord, and Baptised two hundred; The King gave them a place to build a Church in, and monies to that purpose, with libertie to Preach the Gospell. In the Woods of that Kingdome great store of Waxe is made which is thence transported to other parts of India. At Siripur in December, they arrived and were I received as Angels from Heaven, by reason the Bishop of Cochin had Excommunicated the new Captayne with his followers, from which Sentence they hoped the Jesuites would exempt them: and although wee were loth to inter-

meddle, yet could we not but give answer to them. At Siripur the Governour gave us leave to Preach and assigned sixe hundred peeces of Gold for revenue, and roome to build a Church, with promise of all necessaries. I send you two Boyes of Bengala to bee instructed in the Colledge, and next yeere will send two others as your Worship commanded. When we came to Chatigan wee learned that the King of Aracan was gone to the warre of Pegu. Thus farre Fernandes.

Pimenta's Further Observations

Father Baltasar Sequeira was Elected to the Peguan mission, which went to the Towne of Saint Thomas, thence to sayle with the first opportunitie with Father John Costa for Pegu: but wee arrived at Saint Thomas before they were gone...Whiles a new Peguan mission was talked of [at Meliapor], there came ships from Pegu which related the turbulent state of that King-dome, and I will heere adjoyne what I learned of credible persons which a long time had beene eye-witnesses of Pegues prosperitie and adversitie.

Emanuel Carvalius's Letters from Melaka in January 1599

Emanuel Carvalius in his Letters from Malaca, in Januaries, 1599 writeth of an Embassage sent thither from the King of Camboia to obtaine some of the Fathers of Saint Paul (so the Jesuites are called in the East Indies) to bee sent into his Kingdome. This Kingdome of Camboia hath Cauci of Cochinchina on the North, Sion (or Siam) on the South, which also lieth in the midst betwixt Pegu and Camboia, the Sea on the other side. It hath a River which overfloweth yeerely. The Region is fertile, and hath also store of Bejoine and other merchandise. Within twenty yeeres last past this numerous people hath beene much diminished by warres with Siam. Beyond Camboia are the Laos, which inhabite on the Rivers sides, and Lakes made by it. For the River runneth twelve hundred miles, and the head thereof is not knowne by the Camboyans. The Laos which dwelt above on the River twenty yeeres agoe, would needs come downe the River with an Armie of two hundred thousand men, which all perished, and the King of Camboia perished also in the battell. His sonne by helpe of the Portugals expelled the Laos, which ten yeeres together infested the Countrie. They have many Cities and Temples like the Chinois and Japonians, with their Bonzos.

Boves Letter of March 1600

Boves writeth, the eight and twentieth of March, 1600, that the King of Pegu beleagred with a straight siege by the Kings of Tangu and Arracan, delivered himselfe (unable to hold out any longer) to the King of Tangu, which caused his head and the Queenes also to bee cut off.

The like he did to his sonne the Prince. After this he went to the Tower where the Kings treasure was kept, which was so much that scarcely sixe hundred Elephants and as many Horses were sufficient to carrie away the Gold and Gemmes onely. For I say nothing of the Silver and other Metals, as things of no price. The King of Arracan then absent, hearing that the King of Tangu against his agreement with him had taken all this treasure for himselfe, and dismissed the Armie without his Knowledge, came thither with the aide of the Portugals to invade Tangu. I went thither with Philip Brito, and in fifteene dayes arrived at Sirian, the chiefe Port in Pegu.¹

It is a lamentable spectacle to see the bankes of the Rivers set with infinite fruit-bearing trees, now overwhelmed with ruines of gilded Temples, and noble edifices; the wayes and fields full of skulls and bones of wretched Peguans, killed or famished and cast into the River, in such numbers that the multitude of carkasses prohibiteth the way and passage of any ship; to omit the burnings and massacres committed by this the cruellest of Tyrants that ever breathed.

The King of Arracan is now ending his businesse at the Tower of Macao, carrying thence the Silver which the King of Tangu had left, exceeding three millions, besides many and rare pieces of brazen Ordnance remayning in that Castle. The Kings of Siam and Jangoma with great forces have invaded the King of Tangu to despoile him of his spoiles. The King of Arracan is yet Lord of Pegu, though not acknowledged by those which fled or hid themselves, and hath delivered the Port of Sirian to Philip de Brito, that the Peguan fugitives might have refuge under Portugall protection. Brito is in hand with building the Fort, and is earnest for a Residence of our Society. The King of Siam in his way towards Tangu made irruption into the Kingdome of Martavan, but was twice repelled with losse; and hath therefore reenforced his Armie, withall commanding two of his Captaines,

¹ Philip de Brito was notorious for his activities at Syriam. He had been in the service of the Arakanese king, but had a secret agenda to take control of this rich port. De Brito left Syriam shortly after in the hands of his friend and fellow desperado Salvador Ribeyro, who resisted Arakanese attempts to bring Syriam back under their control from 1601-1603. After resuming control of Syriam in 1603 from Ribeyro, De Brito ruled a petty port-state and made marriage and other alliances with rulers at Taung-ngu and Martaban, and sacked Prome as well. Ultimately, he stirred up the wrath of Anauk-hpet-lun (r. 1606-1628) of Ava, who besieged Syriam in 1613. De Brito was captured, then impaled on an iron spike. The Portuguese and others in the town were deported to Upper Burma where they became royal servicemen to the Restored Taung-ngu court, devoted mainly in the use of cannon.

for negligence and cowardise to bee drowned in Caldrons of scalding Oile, after which entring a third time hee hath subdued that Kingdome of Martavan. What after happened in Pegu and Siam, See before in Master Floris his Journall...

Pimenta's Relations of Pegu

The King of Pegu [Bayín-naung, r. 1551-1581], Father of the present [Nan-dá-bayin, r. 1581-1599], of the race of the Bramas, was the mightiest of all which have raigned in Pegu. For hee subdued twelve Kingdomes to his Empire viz. the Kingdome of Cavelan, whence I come the best Saphires and Rubies; Ava, in which are Mines of Ciprian Brasse, Lead and Silver; Bacan, in which are many Gold mines; Tangram, which abounds with Lead and Lac; Prom, which aboundeth also in Lead and Lac; Jangoma, stored with Copper, Muske, Pepper, Silke, Gold, Silver; Lawran, where is store of Bejoine, enough to lade ships; the eight and ninth, are the Kingdomes of Trucon, whence many China wares are transported to us; the tenth and eleventh, are the Kingdomes of Cablan abounding in Gemmes, neere to the Kingdome of Aava, betwixt it and China. The twelfth, is the Kingdome of Sion (or Siam) which he subdued last, and in that Expedition is said to have armed 1,060,000 men, taking one of ten with him to that warre. Hee raigned sixe and thirtie yeeres in such affluence of all things, that one hundred Ships laden with Rice would not have seemed to diminish the store. The plentie of Gemmes was such, that in one moneth a man might have bestowed many talents of Gold thereon.

Yet now there are scarcely found in all that Kingdome any men, but a few which with the King have betaken themselves to the Castle, which with Women and Children are said not to exceed seven thousand. For in late times they have beene brought to such miserie and want, that they did eate Mans flesh and kept publike shambles thereof, Parents abstained not from their Children, and Children devoured their Parents. The stronger by force preyed on the weaker, and if any were but skinne and bone, yet did they open their intrailes to fill their owne and sucked out their braines. The women went about the streets with knives to like butcherly purposes. The cause of this misery was this.

The former King [Bayín-naung] being dead, his Sonne [Nan-dá-bayin] the second moneth of his Raigne hearing that the King of Ava his Uncle affected some change of State, and that fortie of his Grandes had conspired with him, committed those fortie and Burned them all, together with their Wives, Children, Friends and Familiars, causing all that fled out of the fire to bee Cut in peeces. This estranged his Subjects hearts, whereof hee had experience in the Warre & against his Uncle, and therefore offered him single Combate upon an Elephant, the survivor to possesse the Scepter. In this Combat, the King of Pegu slew his Uncle of Ava. But whiles hee was in that expedition, the King of Siam entred the Peguan Confines

with an Armie as farre as a Towne called Satan, divulging a rumour that hee came to ayde his Lord the King. This was much stomacked by the King of Pegu, who sent an Armie against him, commanding the Generall to bring him Captive. But this Armie disposed it selfe, and neglecting the Kings command, returned to their homes. The King after his returne sent to the Siamite to come to him, who offered to continue his Tribute, but refused to come.

Two yeeres after, the Peguan with an Armie of nine hundred thousand men, marcheth against Siam and besiegeth it. The Siamite makes him faire offers, but protracted the time till the third moneth, that in the inundation which happeneth in March, the Kings Armie might be indammaged. That River like Nilus (but in another moneth) useth to cover one hundred and twentie miles circuit in ground, and so overwhelmed this Armie, that scarcely seventy thousand of that great multitude returned to Martavan, and those without Horses and Elephants. The King of Pegu having once and againe made such Expeditions in vaine, at length hee sent his; Brother the King of Jangoma with many Commanders; twice also hee sent his Sonne thither with a great Armie: which committed hostile spoyles, but yet ever returned with the losse of more then halfe their Armie: and his Sonne in the last Expedition was killed with shot of a Piece.

Thus enraged and resolved to revenge, hee made great preparations three yeeres together, and then thought to carrie with him all the Peguans to this warre. But of them, presenting the former dreadfull slaughters and losses to their mindes, some became Talapoies (Friers in their Ethnicisme) others hid themselves in Desarts, and Woods, and many sold themselves for Slaves. The King caused Ximibogo his Uncle to search the publike Records, and to presse one halfe to the warres, he also proclaimed that all which in such a space had turned Talapoies should returne secular; the young should be compelled to the warres, the old to be exiled into the Region of the Bramas, whom hee after changed away for Horses. Hee ordained also that all the Peguans should be branded in the right hand, that every mans name, Countrie and condition might be known. They seeing themselves thus opprobriously branded, Talapoies forced to returne Secular, and old men exchanged for Horses, began to rebell.

The Cosmians first set a King over them, against whom the King sent an Armie, which spoiled all the Countrie, and brought many Captives, whom the King caused to be burned: and continuing his warre upon them, forced by famine, they yeelded to his mercy, but he with exquisite torments slue them all. The next stage of his furie was the Kingdome of Ava, where hee commanded his sonne the Governour to bring them all into the Kingdome of Pegu, now so destitute of Inhabitants; but the aire not agreeing, they brake out in pushes and diseases, which also infected the Natives, that some with impatience of the torture threw themselves into the River. Some of the Pegusians in this time had with the Siamites help, brought the Castle of Murmulan into their possession, whom the King

besieged a yere together. And the Siamites comming on them unexpected, overthrew his Armie, killed his Horses and Elephants, slue and drowned many, tooke others: and so became Lords of all that Countrie, and many Peguan Peeres fled to them; whose wives, children, and families the King after his manner destroyed utterly with fire, sword and water. And thus the whole tract from Pegu to Martavan and Murmulan, was brought to a Wildernesse.

Whiles hee besieged Murmulan, hee sent for his sonne the Vice-roy of Prom, who imagined that it was to proclaime him Heire apparent and so preferre him to his elder brother the Prince of Ava: but when he came was sent to the siege of Murmulan, which he excusing was threatned by his father, and commanded presently to salute his brother, and bee gone thither. Hee returned to Prom, and rebelled against his father. In these broiles the Siamite taketh opportunitie, and marcheth against Pegu in harvest time. Some of their fruits were hastily inned, the rest burned by the Kings command.

The Siamite layeth siege to Pegu, in which were then numbred an hundred and fifty thousand Peguans, Bramans, and of other Nations; three thousand peeces of Ordnance, one thousand of them brasse. The siege continued from Januarie to Aprill, 1596. By the helpe of some Portugals and Turkes, the Citie escaped, and the rumour of Portugals comming by the way of Camboia raised the siege, the Siamite fearing to lose his owne, whiles he sought to winne that which was anothers. But Famine succeeded with a worse siege, which made the forren Souldiers leave the Citie, a few remayning which were fled from Tangu.

The King hereupon commanded the King or Vice-roy of Tangu, to gather the harvest then ripe, and to imbarke it and the people for Pegu.

Hee [the Viceroy of Tangu] answered that hee would send halfe, and that he or his sonne would come.

The King sends foure principall men to fetch him and the provision by force. The Tanguan kills those Commissioners, possessed himselfe of the ships and Souldiers, and by Proclamation prohibiteth returne and aide to Pegu. Thus the famine encreased in the Citie, insomuch that they killed and did eate each other. The King caused the people to be numbred, and there finding seven thousand Siamites, caused them all to be slaine, and divided the provision to the rest, of which there were not of all ages and sexes above thirty thousand remayning.

The King of Prom held out three yeeres against his father, and then repenting, sent messengers that he would bring all the people of Prom, which were 50,000 to the Citie. Hereupon the King pardoned him, and sent him presents. But his chiefe Counsellour which had set him on worke, fearing his head would be the price of his reconciliation, poisoned this young Prince, and aspiring to the Kingdome, was within seven dayes after killed by the Grandes, of whom every weeke almost yeelded a rising Sunne setting in a bloody Cloude: insomuch that in two moneths space, of fifty thousand scarcely fifty men remained, which going to

Pegu, left Prom to the habitation of wilde beasts. Many Pegusians yet remained in other Countries whither they had fled, as in Jangoma, Arracan, Siam.

The Talipots perswaded the Jangoman, brother to the King of Pegu, to usurpe the Kingdome, which he refused, pretending his Oath. They replied, that no Religion hindered, if he placed his brother in the Vahat, that is a Golden throne, to be adored of the people for a God. He also found out another tricke, that his brother of Pegu was borne before his father was enthronized, himselfe after he was now King, begotten also of the old King of Pegu's daughter, whereas the Kings mother was not a Kings daughter.

The King is said to have killed two hundred Eunuches, lest they should betray his huge treasures: it is also reported, that his father caused to be cast three hundred sixty sixe Combalengas of Gold (a great kinde of Gourd) which none knoweth where they be. He hath also sixty seven Idols of Gold adorned with Jewels of all sorts, foure Store-houses with great plenty of Lead, Brasse, Ordnance, without weight. This was then the state of the Kingdome of Pegu, brought to one Citie, and that almost destroyed.

Pimenta's Further Summary of Boves' and Fernandes' Letters

The rest wee will supply out of the Epistle of Andrew Boves, and Francis Fernandes, Jesuites. This writes concerning Martavan, that it is a large Kingdome, but now desolate by the Siamites warre no lesse then Pegu. But two hundred thousands of the Inhabitants lurke in Woods and Mountaines. The King [Banyà-dalá] hath only two or three fortified Cities, not able to withstand the Siamite.

The fertilitie of that Countrie is such, that it yeeldeth yeerely a threefold Harvest, and at what time of the yeere soever they sowe, the seeds come to ripenesse. Cochin and Malaca alone carrie from thence yeerely thirty ships laden with Graine.

The Woods also abound with divers Fruit-trees; the Herbes are almost all both odoriferous and medicinable. It is able to lade yeerely twenty of the greatest ships with Pitch and Timber. Their Fountaines, Rivers, wilde and tame Beasts, Mines of Gold, Silver, Brasse, Iron, and Lead, also of Rubies and Gemmes, likewise their commodious Ports I omit: as also the temperature of the aire, and the hopes of converting the countrie, since frustrated...